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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY USSR/Germany (Soviet Zone)

SUBJECT Soviet Armor Tactics

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50X1-HUM

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50X1-HUM

1.

(a) Usually a tank battalion will support an infantry regiment. However, depending on the decision of the deputy for armor and mechanization on the staff of the division or tank regiment mechanization on the staff of the division, a tank regiment may be given the same mission.

(b) Normally a tank company will support an infantry battalion in the attack on a field fortification but, depending upon tactical considerations, a tank battalion may be assigned this mission.

2.

According to the Army Field Manual (Polevoi Ustav) of 1948 a tank battalion or regiment in support of an infantry regiment is not split up but functions as a unit under its own commander. The CO of the rifle regiment is the overall commander in these cases.

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SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

-2-

50X1-HUM

3.

Tanks must always reach the line of departure before the infantry jumps off, must be in line with the infantry for the attack and make the attack together with the infantry. As many riflemen as possible ride atop the tanks and the others follow behind the tanks. In combat the tanks continue onward while the riflemen (including the tank-borne ones) conduct trench warfare or hand-to-hand fighting, as necessary.

4.

In WW II tanks outdistanced infantry by as much as 15 or 20 km. When tanks are so far in advance, they form an independent fighting unit and cause as much damage as possible in the enemy rear by attacking supply depots, disrupting communications and headquarters, and then return to their own lines. Tanks do not hold enemy territory, - that is the job of the infantry, - but they break through, disrupt the enemy's rear and thus facilitate the follow-up by infantry troops which will hold the enemy territory. Radio control is maintained at all times with the combined commander.

5.

(a) Tanks have no exterior telephones for use in armor-infantry cooperation. Infantry officers or NCOs riding on the tanks give hand signals to other tankborne troops. Tanks move ahead by radio direction, but the infantry commanders must lead the riflemen.

(b) The tank unit commander is in radio contact with the combined commander and gives his units according to messages received from the latter. Experience in the last war showed that when each tank had a radio, too many tank commanders asked directions constantly and greatly handicapped the efficient command and direction of the tanks. Now only tanks in which platoon leaders, company and battalion commanders ride have radios.

(c) At present the tank platoon leaders direct tanks under their control by specially prearranged signals such as semaphores or flares.

(d) [redacted] at present only the tanks of platoon, company, battalion, and regimental commanders have radios. In Ohrdruf in November of 1951 [redacted] tanks of the 57th Gds Rifle Div without antennas and [redacted] no radios.

50X1-HUM

50X1-HUM

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

-3-

6

- (b) The difference between SP artillery and assault guns, as employed in the infantry-tank-SP team is that SP guns move along in line with the infantry, support it with rolling fire as mobile artillery and by over-running enemy strong points with their weight (podavit gusenitsami - crush with tracks). Assault guns usually remain stationary and merely transfer their fire as necessary.

7.

- (a) Tank units intended for exploitation missions are either in line with the infantry or 500 to 1500 m behind the infantry. They are committed simultaneously with the infantry. The distance from the enemy main line of resistance to the tanks depends entirely upon tactical considerations.
- (b) Tank units are timed to hit the main line of resistance as soon as the infantry has broken through the front. If the tanks moved before they would be destroyed immediately.

8.

9.

All Soviet tanks and SP guns carry one or two logs on top of each track. They are used in combination with the logs of other tanks to form a bridge for small AT ditches. The logs are carried on tanks in training.

10.

Tank units are committed only for breakthrough and exploitation purposes. It is the task of the infantry to enlarge the breakthrough.

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

-4-

50X1-HUM

11.

12.

13.

A tank division has a maximum effective time range of three days outside of contact with friendly forces because it has only a three-day supply of food, ammunition and POL. [REDACTED]

50X1-HUM

[REDACTED] Troops are not trained to live off the country. If a tank unit is out of contact with friendly troops for three days it must fight its way back to its own lines to avoid encirclement or annihilation.

14.

(a) Use of dug-in tanks close to or on the MLR depends entirely upon the availability of artillery, and the proportion of tanks and artillery used will be decided by the division commander and his deputy for armor. For defense the division commander may not assign any tanks to the rifle regiments but will hold them as reserves. He will also decide the proportion of tanks to artillery for ambush or fire sack roles. [REDACTED]

(b) Whether used in ambush, fire sack roles, as dug-in tanks, or as reserves, the tanks will be well camouflaged with earth, branches or other materials.

15.

There are no infantry officers in a tank unit. If tanks support the infantry, then the senior all weapons (infantry) commander is in command of both tanks and infantry.

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

SECRET/SECURITY INFORMATION

-5-

50X1-HUM

16.

Infantry support tanks will very rarely do this because their ammunition supply is limited and must be conserved for later use in the breakthrough or combat in depth. Only in very special cases, depending upon tactical considerations, such as the absence of other supporting fire, will they support the infantry advance to the line of departure by stationary fire from the tank jump off place.

17.

no Soviet tanks ever carry mines for the use of engineers or infantry. Contrary to rifle regiments, tank regiments have no engineer companies.

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